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Elmer Holmes Bobst Library
Office of University Archives

70 Washington Square South
New York, NY 10012-1091
Telephone: (212) 998-2646

July 28, 2008

National Endowment for the Humanities

Washington, DC 20506

Dear Sirs/Madams,

It is my pleasure to write in support of the submission of the American Foundation for the Blind for grant funding for the digitization of its Helen Keller Archives. The collection is culturally and historically significant and is unique in its holdings. Creation of digital surrogates would greatly increase access for the research public while simultaneously serving as a preservation medium through the production of high-resolution "archival" files.

The collection has been fully processed and described according to the latest standards and best practices of the Society of American Archivists. The Encoded Archival Description (EAD) inventory to the materials provides an internationally accepted Extensible Markup Language (XML) framework from which to hang the digital files. The Helen Keller Archives is positioned well to take the next step in providing item level access through digital imaging and has chosen an experienced and reputable partner in OCLC.

The proposal is sound and well thought out and project staff members are highly qualified. I am confident that the project will be successful if funded and that the end product will preserve and increase availability to a valuable archival resource.

Sincerely,

Nancy M. Cricco

University Archivist

UNIVERSITY OF CALIFORNIA, DAVIS

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DEPARTMENT OF HISTORY

ONE SHIELDS AVENUE
DAVIS, CALIFORNIA 95616-8611

24 July 2008

I write in enthusiastic support of the American Foundation for the Blind's proposal for digitizing the Helen Keller archives. Such an undertaking is particularly useful at a time when the American public and scholarly community have shown a renewed appreciation for an important figure in our nation's history. It would guarantee that anyone – from high school students to advanced scholars to the general public – would come to a richer and deeper understanding not just of a particular individual but also of major themes in our nation's past. Such access would be invaluable to anyone interested in the history of disability, women's history, the history of religion, and almost any area of twentieth-century American history. Having conducted research in these archives myself, I could imagine a number of courses beginning with middle school and up through the doctoral level in which Keller's correspondence, publications, and tokens of appreciation that people sent to her from all over the world would offer a useful teaching tool. Keller's long life, international stature, and insightfulness would also make the archives a gold mine for people not-necessarily interested in Keller per se: anyone concerned with diplomacy and foreign relations, the Cold War, philanthropy, popular culture, and celebrity, to name just a few.

Moreover, AFB's digitizing these archives guarantees that they would be accessible to people with vision impairments, a fact that would have made my own early work far, far easier. It should be noted that not all digital scanning makes documents easily readable by the assistive technology used by people like me, hence the AFB would also be helping to create a standard and set an example for best practices as other archives contemplate digitization.

In sum, this is a highly valuable project with far-reaching implications for scholarship and American public life. For this reason I support it in the highest possible terms. If you have any questions, please do not hesitate to contact me at: cjkudlick@ucdavis.edu

Sincerely,

Catherine J. Kudlick
Professor of History
President, Disability History Association

UNIVERSITY of WISCONSIN
GREEN BAY

July 27, 2008

To whom it may concern:

Please accept this letter of enthusiastic support for the grant proposal of the American Foundation for the Blind as it seeks to digitize its entire Helen Keller Archival Collection.

As a professional historian I've spent considerable time in the Helen Keller Archival Collection and know it well. Its surface, however, is only scratched. Its content is unparalleled elsewhere. From it we still have an immense amount to learn about the lives of ordinary Americans with disabilities; about charity and philanthropic organizations; about social welfare policies, particularly but not exclusively those pertaining to blind people; about educational institutions international alliances; and about prominent political figures and events.

We have an immense amount yet to learn about Helen Keller, an important figure in U.S. and international history. As a child she became an international symbol of the miraculous possibilities of the modern era. As an adult and for much of the twentieth-century she represented the United States to the rest of the world—either in person or as a larger-than-life public figure. For citizens of countries such as Mexico, Japan, South Africa, or Syria, she literally embodied all that was good about the United States. And in the United States—through her activism as a socialist, suffragist, writer, an advocate of racial equality, and on behalf of people with disabilities—she became involved with hundreds of influential people. We also have an immense amount yet to learn about Anne Sullivan Macy, Helen Keller's teacher and dear friend. Macy developed from an orphaned asylum child to a world-known educator. Through this manuscript collection we can better understand both women and ourselves as a nation.

Because this collection is so important and rich, digitizing matters. The Helen Keller Archival Collection is well kept and monitored, but it grows older while demand for it increases. Long term preservation of this material requires that something be done in order to preserve it effectively. Digitization will ensure that members of the public—professional historians, the interested public, as well as the hordes of children drawn to Helen Keller—are allowed continued access to this important material in the future. It will not only preserve the material for the long term, but digitalization will facilitate usage. Across the globe, professional historians, as well as primary and secondary school teachers, increasingly use and rely on digitized materials for research and classroom usage. Easier access will encourage the use of this material in the pedagogical process and in varied research projects. Digitization will also facilitate easier usage by people with visual impairments, an essential part of the AFB mission.

Over nearly a decade, as author of The Radical Lives of Helen Keller (New York University Pres 2004), editor of Helen Keller: Selected Writings (New York University Press 2005), and author of the forthcoming Beyond the Miracle Worker: The Incredible Life of Anne Sullivan Macy and Her Extraordinary Friendship With Helen Keller (Beacon, 2009), I've spent considerable time

with the archival and communications staff of the American Foundation for the Blind. In all the work I've done with the AFB, I've appreciated the seriousness with which AFB staff members approach the intellectual resources in this collection. The outstanding organizational work of AFB archivist Helen Selsdon means that this collection is well prepared for this project. I'm confident in the ability of AFB staff members to complete this project, to complete it well, on time, and within the projected budget.

I also deeply appreciate the AFB's commitment to making Helen Keller's rich archival collection accessible and available to the general public. The AFB is a private organization and does not have to make this process easy for either researchers or the general public. Yet, as this project and grant application illustrate, the organization and its staff work professionally and cheerfully to make this happen.

I encourage your support of this project. It is viable, important and worthwhile.

Sincerely,

Kim Nielsen, Ph.D.
Professor
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